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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN ABKHAZIA, GEORGIA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 16 of Security Council resolution 1065 (1996) of 12 July 1996, in which the Council requested me to report after three months from the date of the adoption of the resolution on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, including the operations of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). The present report provides an update of the situation as at 4 October 1996. My previous report was issued on 1 July 1996 (S/1996/507 and Add.1). In addition, pursuant to the request of the Security Council in paragraph 13 of resolution 1065 (1996), I reported to the Council on 9 August on possible arrangements for the establishment of a human rights office in Sukhumi (S/1996/644).

II. POLITICAL ASPECTS

2. In spite of continuous efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive political settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict, no significant progress has yet been achieved. The key unresolved issues remain the future political status of Abkhazia and the return of refugees and displaced persons.

3. During the reporting period, my Special Envoy, Ambassador Edouard Brunner, and his resident Deputy, Mr. Liviu Bota, maintained close contact with the representatives of both sides in the conflict, as well as with the representatives of the Russian Federation, in its capacity as facilitator. They also maintained regular contact with senior representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). My Special Envoy is planning to visit the region from 8 to 10 October 1996. On 24 September, I met with the Foreign Minister of Georgia, Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, who was visiting United Nations Headquarters, and discussed the peace process.

4. From 16 to 19 July 1996, a round of negotiations was held in Moscow. Participants included Mr. Vaza Lordkipanidze, Special Representative of the President of Georgia to the Peace Process, and Mr. Anri Jergenia, Special Representative of the Abkhaz leader, Mr. Vladislav Ardzinba. Also present were

Mr. Boris Pastukhov, First Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, as well as my Special Envoy and his Deputy.

5. During these negotiations, my Special Envoy and Mr. Pastukhov each met with the Georgian and Abkhaz sides and then held joint consultations with both sides on the draft protocol (see S/1996/5, para. 40). However, no progress was made, mainly because of incompatible positions on the issue of the political status of Abkhazia. While the Georgian side insisted on the federative nature of Georgia, the Abkhaz side demanded that Abkhazia be given equal status. Both sides maintained these positions during further consultations on the draft protocol, held under the auspices of the Russian Federation in Moscow from 10 to 13 September.

6. In a statement on 11 August 1996 (S/1996/645), the President of Georgia, Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, expressed his readiness to meet in the near future with Mr. Ardzinba, provided that positive results could be achieved. He also acknowledged that in the past the Georgian authorities had made some "fateful mistakes", which affected their relations with Abkhaz, Ossetian and other people and also affected Georgians themselves. Mr. Ardzinba responded on 19 August by affirming his readiness to meet President Shevardnadze and stating that such talks should be based on the provisions of the declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict of 4 April 1994 (see S/1994/397, annex I). While talks between President Shevardnadze and Mr. Ardzinba have not yet taken place, several direct meetings between representatives of the two sides have been held at lower levels.

7. In the latter part of August, Mr. Pastukhov visited Georgia. After holding consultations with the Abkhaz leadership in Sukhumi, he, together with Mr. Lordkipanidze and the Deputy Special Envoy, visited the Gali region for an on-site examination of the situation, including security issues affecting the return of refugees and displaced persons. Mr. Pastukhov then visited Tbilisi, where he was received by President Shevardnadze.

8. During the reporting period, diplomatic envoys of the countries known as the Friends of Georgia visited Sukhumi and held consultations with the Abkhaz leadership.

9. On 30 August, Mr. Ardzinba announced his decision to hold "parliamentary elections" on 23 November 1996. Several Georgian government officials described the proposed elections as illegitimate. President Shevardnadze reacted by saying that the elections were aimed at legalizing the expulsion of Georgians from the region of Abkhazia. On 2 October, the Parliament of Georgia adopted a resolution that considered the Abkhaz decision to hold such elections illegal and any results thereof to be null and void.

10. In a step that could have implications for the Georgian/Abkhaz peace process, President Shevardnadze and the South Ossetian leader, Mr. Ludwig Chibirov, met on 27 August in Vladikavkaz and agreed on further measures for the comprehensive settlement of the conflict in South Ossetia. However, on 6 September, the "Supreme Soviet" of South Ossetia adopted a resolution to "create a presidency" and hold "presidential elections" on 10 November 1996.

III. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

11. United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continue to implement programmes such as the provision of food to civilians without income or access to social networks, delivery of essential drugs to health institutions, distribution of agricultural inputs and emergency repairs to schools.

12. In addition to those programmes, United Nations agencies have begun to focus on the approaching winter months, which will necessitate the provision of winter clothing, blankets and firewood. In the Gali district, with the exception of Gali town, programmes have been seriously hampered by the presence of mines, which are preventing humanitarian organizations from reaching villages where civilians, including spontaneous returnees, are likely to be in dire need of assistance. In the Kodori Valley, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and ICRC are providing health and education materials for the local population.

13. In late July, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat conducted an inter-agency needs assessment throughout Abkhazia, Georgia, and found that many people in the region relied on aid to survive. The assessment also confirmed that young children and single elderly persons were especially vulnerable and that many children and adolescents suffered from post-traumatic stress disorders. The Department recently established a sub-office in Sukhumi to facilitate dialogue with local authorities on United Nations humanitarian assistance and to strengthen coordination of relief activities in the region.

A. The situation of refugees and displaced persons

14. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) believes that humanitarian assistance should be given to those who are displaced internally within Abkhazia, Georgia, and, together with implementing partners, UNHCR is making efforts to identify their needs. Though hampered by the laying of mines, UNHCR has continued to rehabilitate schools in the Gali region for the benefit of spontaneous returnees. It has also begun to implement similar projects west of the Gali region.

B. Human rights

15. On the basis of my report concerning the programme for the protection and promotion of human rights in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1996/644), consultations are continuing in the Security Council.

IV. OPERATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN GEORGIA

16. During the reporting period, UNOMIG continued to operate in parts of the security and restricted weapons zones and in the Kodori Valley (see attached map). The mine threat is still restricting UNOMIG ability to patrol the security and restricted weapons zones in the Gali sector, but patrols continue along the main road (known as the M-27) crossing the sector, as well as in Gali town. The deployment of the Mission and its concept of operations remain as described in my report of 1 July 1996 (S/1996/507). As anticipated in that report (see para. 20), the number of observers in the Mission has been reduced temporarily to 124 to accommodate the forthcoming deployment of the engineering support personnel who will undertake mine-detection and clearing.

17. Since the withdrawal of the team bases in the security zone of the Gali sector (see S/1996/507, para. 19), UNOMIG has worked assiduously to compensate for the resulting lack of first-hand information. A number of observers reassigned to the Zugdidi sector continue to monitor activities south of the Inguri river to assess their effect on the Gali sector. In addition, since June, the Chief Military Observer has authorized observers to conduct foot patrols from the Zugdidi sector into previously inaccessible areas such as the Ganmurkhuri and Horcha pockets, which are north of the river but under the control of the Government of Georgia and into adjacent villages that are under the control of the Abkhaz forces, such as Otobaya. In those communities, UNOMIG now meets regularly with village mayors and others to re-establish dialogue and build confidence among the inhabitants. Joint patrolling with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping force has also enabled UNOMIG to gain access to other parts of the security zone. Observers from the Zugdidi sector have also played a vital role in corroborating information from the southern side of the Inguri river.

18. UNOMIG continues to conduct regular patrols into the Kodori Valley, where they operate from the Adjara team base. Relations between UNOMIG and the local Svanetian community are excellent.

19. The Chief Military Observer has continued to chair the weekly police meetings (see S/1996/507, para. 23), which serve as a forum where the head of the Gali militia and the chief of the Zugdidi police discuss security matters and exchange information. To deal with the increased tension in the Gali security zone (see paras. 22 and 24 below), that forum was recently expanded to allow representatives from the CIS peacekeeping force and security services from both sides to attend. The weekly quadripartite meetings, chaired by the Commander of the CIS peacekeeping force and attended by the Chief Military Observer, have also allowed both sides to discuss security and humanitarian matters.

20. UNOMIG continues to cooperate with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations working on both sides of the Inguri river. At the sector level, and in addition to their primary task, UNOMIG medical teams have again provided first aid to CIS peacekeeping personnel and to the local population and they have often assisted with subsequent evacuations.

V. SITUATION ON THE GROUND

A. General

21. The situation in the Gali security and restricted weapons zones has remained unsettled and, since mid-August, has become increasingly unstable. The situation in the Zugdidi sector remains relatively calm.

22. Lawlessness continues to be a serious problem in the Gali security zone and cases of murder, armed robbery, kidnapping and assault occur frequently. Mine-laying and attacks on the CIS peacekeeping force and the Abkhaz militia checkpoints also continue and the CIS peacekeeping force, in conjunction with UNOMIG, has used the quadripartite meetings to protest such actions. The Abkhaz militia have conducted several "sweep" operations in the security zone to curb criminality in the area, but these operations have only increased the animosity of the largely Georgian population. As a result, Abkhaz plans to establish a permanent militia post in the lower part of the security zone have not materialized. This increased instability has reinforced Georgian demands that police functions be included in an enlarged mandate for the CIS peacekeeping force.

23. None of the UNOMIG military observers or civilian staff has been a victim of violent crime or involved in a mine incident since my last report to the Security Council. However, the Chief Military Observer considers this to be due more to the fact that patrolling has been restricted than to an improvement in security conditions. On 27 June, members of an Abkhaz clan threatened to kidnap or harm UNOMIG personnel unless some relatives of theirs, recently imprisoned on the Georgian side, were released. As a result of that threat, which UNOMIG considered to be serious, armed escorts were provided by the CIS peacekeeping force for a short period along one vulnerable section of the M-27 road. On 11 August, the same clan blocked the same road to prevent a joint CIS peacekeeping force and Abkhaz militia convoy from bringing a Georgian delegation to the Sukhumi airport for the purpose of reburying Georgians killed in an air crash in 1993.

B. Security and restricted weapons zones

24. On 2 July, an Abkhaz militia checkpoint on the Gali canal was attacked with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms, but there were no casualties. On 8 July, a CIS peacekeeping force soldier was shot and injured by two men who refused to identify themselves at a checkpoint. On 18 August, the Abkhaz militia ambushed five armed men crossing the Inguri river, killing one of them, who, in addition to other weapons, was reportedly carrying an anti-tank mine. On 5 September, four members of an Abkhaz militia foot patrol were ambushed near Inguri-Ges by an unidentified armed group that engaged the patrol with automatic fire. There were no reports of casualties. On 13 September, after receiving information from the local Georgian population, the militia carried out another ambush in the security zone against a group of bandits, killing two of them and recovering ammunition, arms and explosives from the site. The Chief Military Observer noted that this was one of the rare occasions when the local population had called on the militia to fight banditry. On 27 September, unidentified

individuals conducted several attacks in the Gali and Ochamchira areas. The Gali militia building was severely damaged and a woman was killed by an explosive device while travelling along the M-27 road. Tension increased as a result of Abkhaz militia operations in the Gali security zone, causing many of the inhabitants to flee to the Georgian side of the Inguri river. On the same day, between 3,000 and 5,000 internally displaced persons gathered in Zugdidi, where some 100 of them established a roadblock barring access to the main bridge over the Inguri river. The aim of the protesters was to express dissatisfaction with the CIS peace-keeping force and the slow progress of resettlement and to influence the outcome of a vote in the Georgian Parliament. That blockade continued until 3 October. Initially, UNOMIG personnel were allowed to cross the bridge on foot after negotiating with the protesters, but for the last 36 hours the blockade was total. On 29 September, unidentified individuals opened fire on an Abkhaz checkpoint across the Gali canal. One or two of the attackers were reportedly killed when the Abkhaz returned fire.

25. My last report contained an account of successful exchanges of hostages in April (see S/1996/507, para. 29). Since then, additional kidnappings have occurred, leading to negotiations for the release of hostages in which UNOMIG was occasionally involved. For example, following several days of negotiations under the chairmanship of UNOMIG, an exchange of four hostages on the Georgian side and four prisoners from the Abkhaz side took place on 7 September at the main Inguri bridge. Procedures established during the spring of 1996 involving the participation of the Commissions for Missing Persons of the two sides appear to be working satisfactorily. The Commissions are currently dealing with an exchange of war dead and of people held in custody on both sides for alleged crimes.

26. Both sides continue to violate the Moscow Agreement of 14 May 1994. Between 25 June and 9 September, UNOMIG recorded 8 violations by the Abkhaz side and 37 by the Georgian side. The majority of the violations were committed by off-duty unarmed soldiers entering the security zone for private purposes. They were protested on the spot.

27. However, three of the above-mentioned violations were especially serious. Between 19 July and 7 August, the Georgian armed forces carried out a battalion-level exercise at the Kulevi training area inside the restricted weapons zone. The exercise, during which amphibious landings were conducted against a defended beachhead, involved the use of tanks, tracked-artillery tractors, armoured personnel carriers and attack helicopters. UNOMIG observers were denied access to the training area on several occasions, in violation of their right to freedom of movement. Strong oral protests on the spot were followed by written protests from the Chief Military Observer to the Georgian Minister of Defence and from the Head of Mission to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. The Abkhaz armed forces mounted a smaller-scale exercise on 2 August at the Ilori training area inside the restricted weapons zone. Although existing patrolling restrictions in the zone prevented UNOMIG from observing the exercise - details about which appeared in a report on Abkhaz television - follow-up action by UNOMIG observers confirmed that tanks and armoured personnel carriers had been used. UNOMIG protested this violation to the Abkhaz side. Both sides claim that such training can only take place in these areas. On 23 September, the armed force of Georgia conducted another

exercise in the Kulevi area that lasted for three days and involved eight aircraft. The exercise was the subject of several protests by UNOMIG.

C. Kodori Valley

28. The situation in the Kodori Valley has improved markedly as a result of the arrival of a Georgian police unit of 100 well-trained and disciplined men. While criminal groups used to evade the Georgian police by seeking refuge in the eastern end of the valley, the arrival of the police unit has forced these groups to retreat into upper Svanetia or to stop operating altogether. UNOMIG has noted a noticeable decrease in lawlessness in the valley and a greater sense of security amongst the indigenous Svanetians. The arrival of the police unit was protested by the Abkhaz side, but this protest was not supported by either UNOMIG or the CIS peacekeeping force.

D. The mine problem

29. Since my last report to the Security Council, there have been four more mine incidents in the Gali security and restricted weapons zones. These incidents caused two deaths, as well as injuries to seven people. On 11 August, one CIS peacekeeping force officer was killed when his supply vehicle ran over an anti-tank mine on a road in the security zone previously used by UNOMIG to go to the former team base at Inguri-Ges. On 20 August, a CIS peacekeeping force sergeant was badly injured when his tracked vehicle detonated an anti-tank mine placed in an observation post used regularly by the force in the restricted weapons zone near the Gali canal. The other two mine incidents occurred in the restricted weapons zones north of the Gali canal and involved an Abkhaz army truck and a civilian truck.

30. In order to improve safety along the M-27 road, UNOMIG has arranged for the resurfacing of parts of the road that were judged to be especially vulnerable to mine-laying. As a result, some of the restrictions on movement along this part of the road will be lifted.

31. A number of mine-protected vehicles are currently on their way to the mission area, where they should arrive in a few weeks. These vehicles, together with the mine-detection equipment already available to UNOMIG, will enhance the Mission's ability to resume some patrolling in the Gali sector. In addition, the Secretariat is awaiting a reply from a Government regarding the provision of mine-detection vehicles and support personnel (see S/1996/507, para. 38). These vehicles should enable the Mission to resume patrolling the Gali sector at a reasonable level of operational effectiveness.

VI. COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION IN GEORGIA AND THE COLLECTIVE PEACEKEEPING FORCES OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES

32. Cooperation between UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force has been good. In particular, the medical staff of both missions have worked closely in complicated evacuation operations, and teams have combined their resources and knowledge in primary and secondary medical care. Similarly, CIS peacekeeping force engineers have assisted UNOMIG on several construction projects by providing heavy lift equipment. In addition, the CIS peacekeeping force has provided the Mission with much-needed military escort along parts of the M-27 road (see para. 23 above) and occasional joint patrolling with armoured vehicles has enabled UNOMIG to re-enter the Gali security zone.

VII. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS

33. The United Nations Resident Coordinator, who is in charge of coordinating United Nations operational activities for development in Georgia, has indicated that United Nations activities in these areas remain as described in my previous report (S/1996/507, paras. 49-51).

VIII. OBSERVATIONS

34. Despite the fact that UNOMIG has had to limit its patrolling of the Gali sector because of the continued mine threat, the Mission has been able to implement some of its mandated tasks in the region through its operations in the Zugdidi sector and through its weekly police and quadripartite meetings with both sides. In addition, the Chief Military Observer's decision to authorize foot patrols in the Gali sector, while not placing the observers in harm's way, will assist the mission in re-establishing contacts with the local population and in preparing itself for expanded patrolling once the mine-protected vehicles reach the Mission area.

35. As the Security Council is aware, the parties have agreed to revise and extend the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping force until 31 January 1997, but this decision has yet to be endorsed by the Council of Heads of State of CIS. I shall inform the Security Council of the implications of this decision, if any, on UNOMIG once the modus operandi of the CIS peacekeeping force is known.

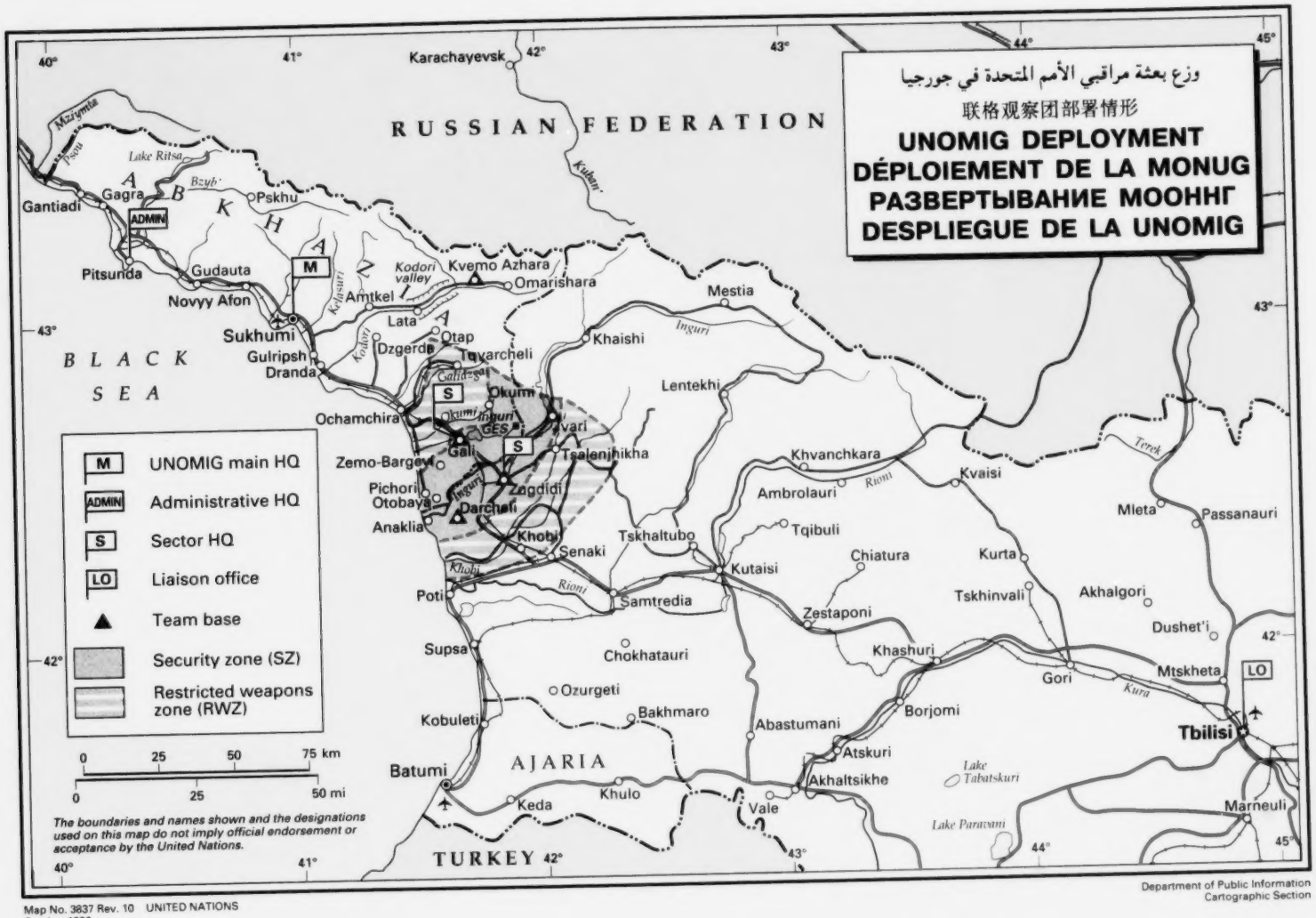
36. The peace process continues to be stalled. Neither has there been progress on the question of the return of refugees and displaced persons to Abkhazia, Georgia. I have therefore asked my Special Envoy to visit the region from 8 to 10 October 1996 in order to assess the situation with representatives of both sides and with the Russian Federation, in its capacity as facilitator. Following his visit to the region, and based on his assessment of the situation, I will consider what steps could be taken by the United Nations to reinvigorate the peace process.

Annex

Composition of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia at 4 October 1996

Country	Military observers
Albania	1
Austria	4
Bangladesh	8
Cuba	3
Czech Republic	5
Denmark	4
Egypt	5
France	5
Germany	8
Greece	3
Hungary	6
Indonesia	6
Jordan	5
Pakistan	8
Poland	5
Republic of Korea	4
Russian Federation	2
Sweden	8
Switzerland	5
Turkey	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	9
United States of America	4
Uruguay	4
Total	117 a/

a/ The number of military observers may vary owing to rotations.



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